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The Change at CIA

There are such strict limits to what is knowable about the Central Intelligence Agency and its workings that any discussion of Mr. Helms' departure from the directorship and Mr. Schlesinger's appointment to replace him must necessarily rest on a comparatively small store of information. Even so, one or two things are plain. And chief among these is the fact, evident from what is known about the two men themselves, that one highly qualified and eminently capable official is being replaced by another.

Richard Helms has spent most of his professional life in intelligence work, and he has acquired a reputation among those qualified to judge, as a man of great honesty and tough-mindedness. The term "tough-minded" in this connection can only summon forth imaginary rather music for some people and visions of grown men running around endlessly shoving each other under trains. But Mr. Helms—unflappable, personally disinterested, and beyond the reach of political or ideological pressures where his judgment is concerned—earned his reputation for tough-mindedness in an intellectual sense. As Agency Director, he has been far less a public figure or celebrity than some of his predecessors—Allen Dulles, for example, or John McCone—evidently preferring to maintain a certain becoming obscurity. He has worked very effectively with some of his overseers on the Hill. And, if the leaked (not by CIA) material, such as the Pentagon Papers, that has been appearing in the press is any guide, he and his Agency have also served their executive branch leaders with some distinction. One gets the impression that from the presumed efficacy

of bombing the North Vietnamese to the presumed necessity of responding to every wild surmise of what the Russians were up to in nuclear weapons development, Mr. Helms has offered a practical, dispassionate and rigorously honest—if not always popular—view.

That the Congress will be pushing for some greater degree of responsiveness from the CIA in the coming session seems pretty certain. And there also is at least a chance that internal bureaucratic difficulties at the Agency will require some managerial rearrangements. In a way, solely because he comes to CIA from outside (not from up the ranks), James Schlesinger may be specially suited to take on both. But he has other qualifications. At the Rand Corporation in California, Mr. Schlesinger did analytic work that gave him more than a passing familiarity with the intelligence estimating business. At the Budget Bureau—as it was then known—in the early days of the Nixon administration he proved himself a very astute, not to say downright cold-eyed, scrutinizer of military budget requests. His brief term at the AEC was notable in several respects. Mr. Schlesinger bucked the pressure of the atomic energy establishment to insist that the AEC take note of and respond to the claims of its ecological critics. And he attempted to push the agency back from its political role toward the more disinterested service role it was meant in the first place to fulfill. He, like Mr. Helms, is demonstrably a man of talent, dedication and impressive intellect. We should have been content to see them stay on in their present jobs. But if Mr. Helms is to leave the Central Intelligence Agency, we think Mr. Schlesinger is a first class choice to replace him.